
Roles & Best Practice Indicators of Developmental Therapy Specialists



Roles & Best Practice Indicators of Developmental Therapy Specialists

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The Developmental Specialist Task Force

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Preface

Developmental Therapy is a service provided by qualified specialists. By reviewing this material, Developmental Therapy Specialists, their professional colleagues, and the families they serve will have a better understanding of the activities involved in this complex and comprehensive early intervention service. Developmental Specialist is the *professional* who, according to the Random House dictionary, “devotes himself or herself to one particular branch of a subject or pursuit.” Indiana’s First Steps Early Intervention System has identified the service we provide as Developmental Therapy.

With a specialized knowledge of infant/toddler development, the Developmental Specialist looks at the **whole** child and the impact of the child’s development on the family and caregiver. This role includes the knowledge and expertise to design and implement interventions within the child’s regular routines and activities that occur in both home and community settings. It also means supporting, problem solving, and consulting with community providers to welcome and include children and their families.

Developmental Therapy requires a working knowledge of typical and atypical child development, developmentally appropriate practices, family dynamics, cultural diversity, and team process. The provider, a Developmental Therapy Specialist, in collaboration with families and other agencies, personnel, and disciplines, assesses children birth through age two for early intervention service eligibility. Developmental Specialists build on family strengths to design, coordinate, implement, and evaluate interventions that are individualized, naturalistic, and family centered. They also work in partnership with parents to enhance the parent/child relationship while assuming new confidence in supporting their child’s development throughout daily, naturally occurring activities. Finally, they ensure the parent has knowledge of their legal rights as they move within and from the early intervention system.



In 1999-2000 a series of Developmental Therapy Workshops were held to gather information from direct service providers regarding the specific roles and responsibilities of the Developmental Specialist in Indiana’s First Steps Early Intervention System.

A task force of direct service and university personnel met over several months, with support from Indiana's Unified Training System resources, to review and synthesize the roles and best practice indicators into an organized form to present to Developmental Therapy Specialists during a statewide forum in June of 2000. It was an initial attempt to identify roles and best practice indicators for Developmental Therapy in Indiana.

These roles and best practice indicators are an overview of the activities that Developmental Specialists are involved in on a day-to-day basis. The focus is both the child and the family as teacher, mentor, and partner in the Early Intervention System.

The results from Forum participants are presented in this document.

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Role #1: Team

The Developmental Specialist is responsible for communicating and collaborating with the early intervention team to support the development, implementation, and ongoing assessment of IFSP outcomes.

The Developmental Specialist:

- C supports the belief that a child's development is too complex to be addressed by a single discipline and actively refers to and consults with others to understand, welcome, and coordinate the team's approach to each child and family;
- C involves parents as active participants in the assessment process;
- C evaluates/assesses the child's level of functioning, utilizing both formal and informal assessment instruments and procedures, including observation, within the child's natural routines and activities;
- C assists in the development and implementation of a program plan (IFSP) to meet the assessed needs of the child within the context of the family;
- C with adequate notice from the service coordinator and consideration given to the family's schedule and concerns, actively participates with team members in IFSP meetings;
- C shares communication regarding services and strategies to all IFSP team members both verbally and in written form;
- C provides support, training, and/or consultation as part of the child and family/caregiver's everyday routines and activities;
- C recognizes that all team members make valuable contributions and will support consensus on any issues not mutually agreed upon;
- C completes all written forms and information required in a timely manner to share with the family, team, and SPOE office;
- C is an informed and active participant to support the family whose child transitions from the First Steps system; including both the child who is eligible for preschool special education and the child who may not be eligible but benefits from ongoing educational and social stimulation.

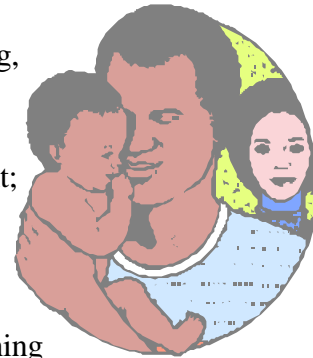


Role #2: Family

The Developmental Specialist collaborates with the parents/ caregivers, to support children's learning and development incorporated into the family's daily routines/activities.

The Developmental Specialist:

- C respects and is responsive to family/caregiver lifestyle choices including family structure, religion, ethnicity, child rearing beliefs, and values;
- C utilizes appropriate listening, observation, and interviewing skills to identify the family's/caregiver's perceptions of their child's abilities, strengths and needs;
- C shares accurate information on developmental skills of the child based on observation, developmental screening tools, and/or discussion with parent/caregiver;
- C supports parent/caregiver in learning to observe and interpret the child's behavior and follow their child's lead in play;
- C models for the family and caregiver strategies to support learning, including encouragement to access community resources and supports;
- C assists parent/caregiver in anticipating next steps in development;
- C supports the family/caregiver as primary decision-maker and promotes acquisition of knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and carrying out goals for their child;
- C together with the family/caregiver, designs and implements learning opportunities for the child utilizing the family/caregiver and child's daily routines;
- C promotes parent/caregiver's understanding of the impact of play on all areas of the child's development through ongoing discussion and modeling;
- C demonstrates awareness of the impact of the disability on development; has the ability to identify resources and may assist parent in gaining more complete information on a variety of subjects that include etiology, characteristics, and classifications of common disabilities in young children;
- C supports the parent/caregiver's ability to interpret the child's cues accurately and respond appropriately;
- C recognizes the parent as the primary educator and expert of their child while offering the knowledge of additional early intervention supports to enhance the child and family's opportunities.

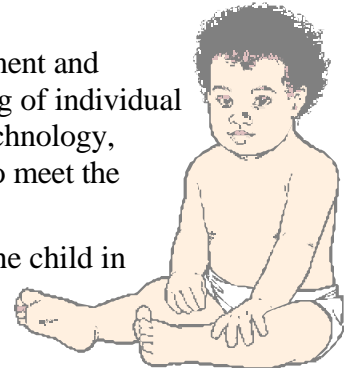


Role #3: Child

The Developmental Specialist offers accurate knowledge of child development and family-centered/relationship-based approach to intervention with children and families to enhance the child's optimal development.

The Developmental Specialist:

- C promotes and advocates for the child within the family;
- C supports and facilitates family and child interactions as primary contexts for learning and development;
- C through the reinforcement of knowledge and strategies of multiple disciplines, provides opportunities that support the development of the **whole** child while designing interventions that address individual developmental outcomes on the IFSP;
- C has a working knowledge of birth-to-three development and the dynamics of the caregiver/child relationship;
- C uses knowledge of how young children differ in their development and approaches to learning to support the development and learning of individual children including use of technology, adaptive and assistive technology, and/or creating and modifying environments and experiences to meet the individual needs of the child;
- C addresses, with parent/caregiver, the behavioral concerns of the child in order to optimize the learning opportunity within the natural routines of the child and family;
- C understands and is able to promote the central role of play in child development through facilitating the child's learning of social play, turn taking, and play with peers, siblings, and adults;
- C supports preservation of the language/dialect used by most members of the family, and promotes antiracist approaches in creating learning environments and experiences for young children;
- C provides play opportunities and crossover reinforcement within natural family and community routines;
- C supports the parent/caregiver in designing or modifying a learning environment for the child by jointly choosing appropriate play activities/interaction skills which support the child's learning;
- C plans for and links current developmental and learning experiences and teaching strategies with those of the next educational setting (transition).

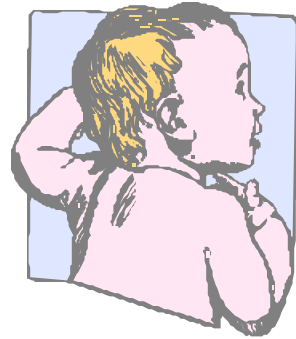


Role #4: Community

The Developmental Specialist provides support and consultation services (i.e., knowledge, expertise, advocacy, direct assistance) to community providers in accordance with the child and family's everyday routines and activities.

The Developmental Specialist:

- C ensures that all intervention is consistent and embedded within the family's everyday activities including community experiences;
- C maintains family priorities when early intervention is provided in other settings;
- C within the community settings that the family participates in, implements developmentally and functionally appropriate individual and group activities using a variety of formats, including play, inquiry, cooperative learning, and environmental routines;
- C serves as a consultant and resource to community settings regarding child development and strategies for inclusion;
- C continually works to enhance and improve early childhood settings within the community in order to meet the individual and developmentally appropriate needs of ALL young children;
- C is aware of and involved in community activities including First Steps Council activities (i.e., provider meetings, community health fairs, LPCC subcommittees), Step Ahead Council, and/or other community endeavors in order to expand personal knowledge of resources while advocating for family supports and services (e.g., transportation, respite, grants, etc.), and awareness of early intervention services;
- C when promoting child and family participation in a community experience, ensures that outcome has immediate, functional relevance.
- C serves as a link to the service coordinator when assisting the family in accessing information and gaining skills to participate successfully in community experiences;
- C promotes and articulates the role and knowledge base of the developmental specialist to service providers while supporting and offering strategies for inclusion of ALL young children and their families in community activities and supports.



Role #5: Professional Development

The Developmental Specialist advocates and models professionalism, ethical behavior, and commitment to life-long learning.

The Developmental Specialist:

- C understands and practices the **concepts** of Developmentally Appropriate Practices for children birth to three;
- C models ethical and legal principles of the profession; in particular, understands the importance of maintaining strict confidentiality at all times;
- C identifies current trends and issues of working with infants and toddlers who have special needs and seeks out opportunities to remain current in the field of child development, early childhood, and early childhood special education;
- C seeks out opportunities and participates in training, workshops, or other ongoing professional development opportunities to increase knowledge and skills while remaining current in the field of child development, early childhood and early childhood special education, and is aware of the available resources and professional organizations related to the field;
- C establishes and maintains positive, collaborative relationships with colleagues and other professionals;
- C understands the importance of contributing to and participating in the professional organizations related to the field;
- C advocates for young children, families, and improved quality of services and programs for young children as well as for the enhanced professional status of early intervention providers;
- C maintains periodic use of self-assessment tool to target goals, and specifies steps to ensure ongoing personal professional growth.



Notes